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852 773 *Native Interpretation.*—The forked sticks with the pole across are the house of the two women. The ritual of the women who answer the two snakes and beat the ground with their clubs parallels that of the two old women in Section D. The men in the bush are the snake. The boys who are hanging from the rafter are flying foxes. When the women move back and the men sit down in a line under the rafter, "This means one people, and the rafter is the snake and the people are Muit food.—They are all the same as the birimbir of Bapa himself. —They are Muit and they are one people." When the boys crawl from behind the line of men to one end of the line, they are brought to the tail of Muit and "They are the young snakes of that big one." When the boys crawl up to the head of the snake and receive the food from the head (the Yiritja snake sitting on the forked pole), "This means the children all want food [the children of the snake] and the snake spews out the two women and they [the children] eat it [the two women] and give it back to him [spit out the food again]."

All the above was told to me by the leaders of the Gunabibi, both during the actual portrayal of the ceremony itself and in conversations during the hours of rest between the morning and evening dances.

852 776 825 The significance of the flying fox to the Murngin is that he is a mokoi or trickster spirit of the dead who lives in the bush. He is a generally recognized symbol to all of the spirit that does not go into the water hole but goes out into the bush or the jungle or to the Morning Star Island at time of death (see Barnumbir myth, page 524). —"A flying fox is all the same as the dead spirit from the bush. It is Dua."[18]

852 J. Ceremonial Purification

302 783 1. The men and women paint themselves with red ocher and kangaroo fat. The neophytes are brushed with smoking ironwood branches.

[766 302 841] [18] When an uncircumcised child dies, its mother has the wings of a flying fox painted on her shoulders and the body of the fox painted on her abdomen. "This flying fox is the birimbir spirit of that dead baby. This is done for both Yiritja and Dua mothers and babies." The same painting is sometimes put on a woman when she has had her first menses. The woman is placed inside a hut and, when she wants to move, is given two yam sticks with which to turn over. The yam-stick movement is ceremonial and symbolic of the movement of the two old women who walked with the aid of a yam stick in each hand.

[783] The condition of the boys, or women who are menstruating, of the mother of a dead child, etc., is said to be djo-ak, which means ritually unclean. "If a mother or muri or yeppa sleeps close to dead baby that sweat comes out and makes the mother unclean. Women put red ocher on after this. No one can take food from these women until the bones are dug up and she is painted by her husband with flying fox."

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and outsiders are then allowed to enter the camp itself. The mother of the dead individual paints herself with red ocher, as does the female mari of the person. This is to remove the taboo from them so that they can go out and gather fire wood and water as well as food. Before that time they must stay in the camp. The mother is not supposed to paint herself before the grave post is put up. If she does, and puts water on herself to make the red ocher spread, the body of the dead person will not decompose but stay firm so that the bones cannot be painted and properly treated. "The mother that belongs to that dead man cries every night for him. She cries a long time, maybe until one rain is over. All the people go back now to take out that dead man. They take the paper bark off his body. It has a very strong smell. Some people don't like to see that, but some people have strong hearts. We keep the young people away and the women do not look."

Exhumation of the Bones.—After a minimum of two or three months or a maximum of a season the body is exhumed under the direction of the father or some near relative of the dead man. If it is a child and has been buried beside the house, the father pulls the house down and makes a windbreak with it. The women relatives sit on one side of the windbreak and men on the other. They sit so that the wind blows between the male and female lines. At the head of the grave a small fire is built out of wet material so that it will smoke. The smoking fire, with the aid of a strong wind, prevents the stench from being too heavy. It is believed that no one should walk through the smoke that comes from the fires and grave, for the stench of the dead would make him ill. The fires are lit not only to kill the smell of decaying flesh but also so that the wind won't blow the odor a great distance, for it is believed that the stench is consumed by the smoke. The windbreak acts as a screen in front of the women so that they cannot see what is taking place. If an adult is being disinterred the screen is placed in the same way, but the material is not from the house of the parents. The mokul bapa (father's sister) can and does sit on the side of the men.

Strips of paper bark are made ready on which to place the bones. The bark is cut into sections. The inside sections of the stringy-bark tree are broken into handfuls of waste with which to clean the bones, and water is brought in large melon shells.

The men sing the garma cycle of songs while the women dance to a monotonous syncopated rapid rhythm: alternately one arm touches the head, and the hand of the other arm is lowered to the abdo-

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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262 Variety in this otherwise uninteresting vegetable diet is provided by fish, birds, reptiles, and small animals. Women [962] fossick in jungles for land-snails and large white wood-grubs, [226] and when the tide is out they comb the mud flats and reefs [222] for mangrove worms, shellfish, oysters, lobsters, and crabs.

231 Some women train dingoes to help in their ceaseless search for small animals, reptiles, birds, and eggs. A dingo pup, captured in the bush, henceforth shares the family shelter, travels in the canoe, and is fed and petted with the children. They are often called 'son' by the owner and referred to by the relationship term used for the owner or his child. When [766] a favoured dog dies, it is buried and wept over in much the same way as a child. Women gash their heads and wail, one of the men conducts a mourning-song and dance, and I have seen them switch themselves with leafy twigs to drive off the canine ghost!

Dingoes breed freely with domesticated dogs, and most of the wild dogs in Arnhem Land now bear unmistakable traces of the white man's dog. However, the pure-bred dingo is by no means extinct, and there are many of these large, strong, good-looking brown dogs in Arnhem Land. When they are well fed (they seldom are), they grow to almost twice the size of a kelpie and are attractive in appearance, but they cannot bark. It seems certain that the dingo [174] migrated with the first aborigines, and Dr F. Wood-Jones, an authority on the dingo, says: 'The dingo and the Stone Age dog of Europe are practically identical and both but little removed from the Palearctic wolf stock from which they sprang. Man and dog were both migrants.'

773 Several Yulengor legends referred to the creation of dingoes by aboriginal Ancestors. In one story, it was said that having already formed the nuclei of several hordes, the Ancestors came to the grassy plains south of Arnhem Bay, where they made a magpie, an opossum, and two dingoes. Summer showers drove the birds into a tree, where they

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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sticks were pulled out and thrown on the heap to deter inquisitive dingoes. 765

Meantime the grandfather sang songs appropriate to the departing spirit, the most important being the plover song. A plover is a spirit from Buralkor disguised with feathers so that mortals may see it, and its purpose is to guide human spirits on their way to the spirit world. Native-companions, geese, jungle fowls, and cockatoos are similarly revered by the Yiritja moiety, except that they have no qualms about eating them. Moreover, these are genuine birds and not visible spirits like the plover. Their importance lies in their supernatural ability to see spirits and to assist them. 765 533 825 [715]

As the grandfather sang the bird-songs, his sons accompanied him with clap-sticks and women danced and made the bird-signs. For the plover they held their hands in front of their shoulders with the fingers half clenched like talons; this gesture is also used ordinarily in their sign-language to indicate death, a corpse, or wandering ghost. Geese were introduced by imitating their cries and by holding short sticks between the hands for bird-perches. Long-winged native-companions could not be mistaken when the dancers extended their arms and flapped them. At the end of the ceremony a tribal-mother carried the bones to her camp and deposited them in the fork of a tree; in bush-camps such parcels can be seen in trees or in forked sticks. Skulls are of more importance and are painted and hoarded for as long as ten years. 765 535 201 825 765

It is usual to expose infants and to bury older children and adults, though no particular significance is attached to either method and both are preliminaries to the collecting of the skeleton. A corpse is buried in a shallow grave face downwards to facilitate the removal of the bones by lifting the backbone to which the greater part of the skeleton is attached. Bones may be collected in four or five days, a week or several months after burial, depending on the regard the [766] [764]

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765 horde had for the deceased. In decimated hordes, and in the case of aged and unwanted wives, I have known bodies to be left in the ground and no attempt made to remove them.

775 Until bones have been collected and a mother is
783 'purified' she remains smeared with red-ochre and leads an
765 inactive life. Relatives feed her and carry water from the
[302] well so that she will not desecrate it, for her child's ghost hovers near her and may attach itself to anything she handles. Similarly the relative who dismembers the body is tabu because of the ghost lodging in his skin, and he also is barred from waterholes and from feeding himself and becomes dependent on the hospitality of the family of the corpse. They are expected to treat him well even to the extent of
[431] making presents in return for the favour he has done them in attending to the corpse and running the risk of absorbing the ghost. Consequently there is no difficulty in getting 'grandsons' to run these risks, and the father not infrequently declines several offers and even limits the number of morticians to two or three.

783 This final purification ceremony is similar to the 'mum-
765 bakuta' described in Chapter 5. Food is deposited in a
[264] totemic well conveniently scooped in the sand, and from this a ceremonial meal is eaten by the victims of the tabu and by certain near relatives. Waste food is piled into the well and burnt, to prevent dingoes disturbing it, and the tabu is finally lifted and the ghost removed when the relatives heat leafy twigs in a fire and switch their bodies. Alternatively, water or sand may be poured over the 'unclean' as they stand in the totemic well and smear themselves with red-ochre.

761 All deaths are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion,
754 but the death of an active warrior is always attributed to sorcery. In such case the body is left in the ground for a very
765 short time before the bones are collected. Smaller ones are
[266]